

Lincoln and Congress

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ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Hubbard, Charles M. "Lincoln and Congress." *The Annals of Iowa* 76 (2017), 439-440.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12431>

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Lincoln and Congress, by William C. Harris. Concise Lincoln Library. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2017. ix, 165 pp. Illustrations, notes, essay on sources, index. \$24.95 hardcover and e-book.

Reviewer Charles M. Hubbard is professor of history and Lincoln Historian at Lincoln Memorial University. He is the author of *Lincoln and His Contemporaries* (1999) and edited *Lincoln, the Law, and Presidential Leadership* (2016); *In His Words: Readings from the Life of Abraham Lincoln* (2014); and *The Many Faces of Lincoln* (1997).

William C. Harris contributes significantly to our understanding of the political environment surrounding Lincoln throughout his presidency. He provides perceptive insights into the unique relationship between Lincoln and the congressional leadership as both sought to provide supporting legislation to prosecute the war and reconstruct the Union. Harris quotes extensively from the *Congressional Globe* and depends on the words of members of the House of Representatives and the Senate to express their personal views and those of their respective constituents on a variety of critical legislative issues, including habeas corpus, conscription, the two controversial Confiscation Acts, and ultimately the Thirteenth Amendment.

Lincoln and Congress is organized chronologically, beginning with the secession crisis of 1860–1861 when Lincoln demanded Republican support against the expansion of slavery. The concise narrative evolves into an insightful and thoughtful assessment of potential threats to the U.S. Constitution, civil rights, and institutions of the government. During the fall and winter of 1862, Lincoln and Republicans suffered from disappointing war news and the frustrating results of the off-year elections. Harris emphasizes Lincoln's extraordinary leadership in this difficult political environment to unify an otherwise divided Congress to support his policies and the war effort.

The final section of the book is devoted to a discussion of Lincoln's final address to Congress on December 6, 1864. In that address (an underutilized source), Lincoln lobbied for quick adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment. He also made specific references to the impact of the war on the western states. Summarizing the Secretary of the Interior's report on western affairs, Lincoln noted that the "great enterprise of connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific states by railroad and telegraph lines has been entered upon with a vigor that gives assurance of success" (117). Possibly of as much interest to James Harlan of Iowa and other western representatives was his call that the "Indian system should be remodeled." Lincoln said that the reforms should provide for "the welfare of the Indian and the protection of the advancing settler" (117). Here Harris calls attention to the domestic agenda that Lincoln, ever faithful to his Whiggish principles, endorsed. Lincoln respected Congress

as the voice of the people and cooperated with sensitivity and understanding whenever possible.

In *Lincoln and the Radicals* (1941), T. Harry Williams established the view that Lincoln and the Radical Republicans engaged in an ongoing confrontation. Harris argues persuasively that Lincoln and the radicals cooperated on a complex domestic agenda while enacting supportive legislation for the war effort. However, Harris, possibly to be concise, often drifts into oversimplifying his conclusions. Nonetheless, despite occasional lapses, he contributes to a fuller understanding of the most complex, pragmatic, and idealistic political leader in American history, particularly Lincoln's amazing ability to work with Congress.

Lincoln and the Democrats: The Politics of Opposition in the Civil War, by Mark E. Neely Jr. Cambridge Essential Histories. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. ix, 211 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.99 paperback.

Reviewer Jennifer Weber is associate professor of history at the University of Kansas. She is the author of *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (2006).

About halfway through *Lincoln and the Democrats*, author Mark E. Neely Jr. notes that, "for the most part," historians have "simply neglected" the Democratic Party during the Civil War years (85). For the most part that is true. In the past decade or so, however, the Peace Democrats, or Copperheads, have received considerable attention. War Democrats, though, have remained largely in the shadows. Although Neely does not say so directly, this slim volume attempts to shed light on that less flashy group while making some (rather limited) efforts to knit their story together with that of their more cantankerous political brethren. The result is a collection of thought-provoking essays that is easily accessible for advanced undergraduates and the interested public as well as more scholarly types.

Neely is one of the leading political historians of the period, so one should always pay attention to what he has to say. In this, which he says is his last book on the Civil War, he does not disappoint. He argues, for instance, that the Civil War era was far less partisan and divided than other scholars have suggested; that the main reason Democrats performed so well in the 1862 elections was that Lincoln did not campaign, even indirectly, for his party; and that Lincoln helped bring the country into a "new era of human rights" (204). Each of these arguments is likely to make Civil War historians sit up and pay attention, for each is new and innovative—and compelling.